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ABSTRACT

Generally, in Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) teacher education, various teaching approaches are introduced to trainee teachers by highly experienced teachers or specialists. This training helps trainees acquire a particular body of knowledge about JSL, and hopefully through this approach, teaching methods that are commonly perceived to be correct will be taught and practiced. Recently, because the variety of Japanese language students has increased, there has been a growing need to consider students' needs and purposes of study in curriculum design. Consequently, teachers have had to develop and modify their teaching methods to suit these more diverse needs. The paper suggests that in order to promote prospective teachers' creativity and thinking skills, a new direction is needed for teacher development through critical reflection and collaboration. The author has been involved in Japanese language teacher education in a night course for adults. In the teaching methodology and practicum classes, trainee teachers have been gradually increasing their autonomy as individuals through opportunities for self-directed reflective practice and in collaboration with fellow trainees through post-practice mutual evaluations. This paper discusses this teacher training practice in relation to a reinterpretation of autonomy theory from learner autonomy toward teacher autonomy. (SM)

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Metacognitive awareness in JSL/JFL teacher education: from learner autonomy towards teacher autonomy

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Abstract

Generally, in JSL (Japanese as a Second Language) Teacher Education, various teaching approaches are introduced to the trainee teachers by highly experienced teachers or specialists. The purpose of such a training approach is usually to assist trainee teachers to acquire a particular body of knowledge related to the field of JSL and it is hoped that through this approach, teaching methods which are commonly perceived to be correct teaching methods will be taught and practiced. Recently, because the variety of Japanese language students has increased, there has been an increasing need to consider the students' needs and their purposes of study in curriculum design and consequently teachers have had to develop and modify their teaching methods to suit these more diverse needs.

It is the author's belief that in order to promote prospective teachers' creativity and thinking skills, a new direction is needed for teacher development through critical reflection and collaboration. The author has been involved in Japanese language teacher education in a night course for adults at a private institution. In the teaching methodology and practicum classes, trainee teachers have been gradually increasing their autonomy as individuals through opportunities for self-directed reflective practices, and in collaboration with fellow trainees through (post-practice) mutual evaluations. In this paper, the above teacher training practice will be discussed toward a reinterpretation of autonomy theory.

Introduction

I have been involved in a JSL(Japanese as a Second language) / JFL (Japanese as a Foreign language) teacher education course run as night adult classes at a private institution. The class members (i.e. the trainee teachers) were highly motivated to become teachers of the Japanese language, but despite this motivation, at the beginning of the course their objectives were not very clear. Although most of them had a wish to work abroad using Japanese language skills, this wish was formulated in only a very broad sense and some of them did not even have any idea as

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to what a teaching job involves.

At first, the class members acted within the teacher-educator's (i.e. my) control and direction. In essence, they just followed the instructions I gave them. Gradually, however, the atmosphere in the class has become supportive and cooperative rather than authoritative. Now, a relationship of mutual reliance has been established among the trainee teachers and they have been able to experience and exhibit greater true autonomy and collaboration in the class.

In this paper, I would like to reflect on how my metacognitive awareness as both a teacher-educator and a language teacher was affected by involving myself in the development of the learner. First of all, I would like to report on the development and its outcome. Secondly, considering the above effects and my own reflections, I would like to discuss my own interpretation of the principle of learner autonomy and teacher awareness of the development of the learner.

- (This course consists of 420 hours teaching over one year. The methodology class was 3 hours of lecture time, with 10 sessions and teaching practice consisted of 6 sessions. These sessions are for teaching learners of intermediate & advanced levels and set up after completing the methodology and teaching practice for beginners. There were approximately 15 adult students in the class.)

Metacognitive awareness as a teacher

Focusing on learning rather than teaching, the concept of learner autonomy is connected with a learner's metacognitive awareness of self-responsibility as a learner (ef. Holec,1981). It is my belief that learner autonomy development is closely related to teacher awareness of, and sensitivity to, learner autonomy because as long as teachers maintain their role as an authority figure and put learners in passive positions, learner-centred autonomous classroom learning will never be realized. As a first step, teachers should at least be able to consider this kind of classroom learning. Learner development is often discussed through learner training (ef. Dickinson,1992; Wenden,1998) and recently, learner autonomy and teacher autonomy have begun to be considered together (Barfield,2001; Vieira,1999; McGrath,2000; Smith,2000). However, until now the development of those who function both as teacher-educators and as teachers involved in learner development have not yet been studied in detail.

The report on learner (i.e. trainee teacher) development

First of all, I decided to encourage the learners to get rid of their expectations that they would only receive and be required to master certain requisite knowledge and information about methodologies. The class learning emphasis was on helping them form their own ideas and opinions by questioning and reflecting on their past language learning experience. They were given opportunities to analyze their beliefs on language learning, the teacher's role, effective language learning strategies, etc. through writing journals and pair/group discussions. During

their teaching practice phase, the learners themselves were responsible for the key metacognitive strategies of the planning - monitoring - evaluation process. In other words, the class members carried out their own lessons by going through the above process. Also, to help them identify the importance of mutual interaction, the members participated interchangeably as both learners and teachers to see the lessons from different viewpoints. In particular, monitoring and reflective practices were emphasized. As a basis for this learner development, Wenden (2001)'s concepts of: 1) metacognitive knowledge (person knowledge, task knowledge, strategy knowledge), and metacognitive strategies; and; 2) the key strategies of autonomous learning (planning-monitoring-evaluating) ; together with Little (1991)'s concepts of: 1) critical reflections ; 2) interdependence ; 3) learning- living connections were utilised.

The contents of lectures include material on: 1) teaching methodologies; 2) syllabus, curriculum, teaching materials, and tasks; 3) teaching planning methods, information about Japanese teaching situations inside/outside Japan and so on. In this paper, however, I would like to discuss my own awareness with a focus on raising metacognitive awareness.

The following activities were included (Figure 1):

[Figure 1: Learner development]

Learner (trainee teacher's) development

Metacognitive awareness raising by:

(1) sharing ideas about classroom learning, teacher/learner roles
(2) knowing what is involved in the job of a Japanese language teacher
(3) thinking critically about present teaching methods and materials

Teaching practices by:

(1) self-direction
(2) interaction between the lesson organizer and other members for the purpose of planning one's own lesson

(The lesson organizer)	<———>(Other members)
Planning own lesson	
- using original ideas on teaching method and materials	
- critical reflections	Opinion exchanges
Performing	
- experiencing a lesson as a teacher	- participating as a learner
Reflecting	
- identifying those points which they were or were not able to do well	- getting ideas and critical thinking about teaching
- class participants' attitude and performance	- experiencing as a learner
Evaluating	
- self-evaluation of that day's lesson	- peer evaluation of the lesson

Classroom discussions by:

(1) self-reflection
(2) opinion exchanges

Metacognitive awareness raising:

(1) Reflecting on their own past language learning experience

The class members had opportunities to think about language learning and teaching by sharing their own various past classroom learning experiences. They shared their ideas and beliefs about good classroom learning, and about the respective teacher and learner roles.

(2) Encouraging the own objective and goal awareness

Facilitated by the teacher-educator, the class members raised their metacognitive awareness as to the job of the Japanese language teacher. Various teaching situations were introduced to encourage the trainee teachers to rethink the teacher's role depending on such factors as the students' age, cultural and educational background, learning environment.

(3) Critically viewing present teaching methods and raising metacognitive awareness of tasks and materials

The class members' ability to evaluate and critique lessons was enhanced by watching several videos of model teaching. While watching the videos, the trainee teachers were required to focus on four points in particular; 1) the teaching methods used, 2) the students' attitude and performance, 3) possible improvement of the teaching, 4) identifying problems and generating ideas for potential solutions. Also, using actual teaching materials from my own classes, metacognitive knowledge and strategies were promoted on appropriate use of the materials, and identification of the purpose for which they were designed.

Teaching practices:

(4) Raising metacognitive awareness on classroom learning, and its process towards autonomous awareness

The members performed their own lesson according to plans they had personally formulated, while teaching materials were also decided on and made by themselves. Lessons were planned with respect to their own individual ideas and styles and during this planning process, they were strongly encouraged to self-question as to what, how and why they intended to do as they planned. Also, they were advised to make the best use of their experience and any strong points in regards to their style, to use authentic materials closely related to their own life, and to concentrate on their awareness of *learning* rather than *teaching*. Then, through group discussions experienced by each trainee teacher on several occasions, opinion exchanges were arranged in order to help them reconsider the original teaching plan. In this way, their critical reflection and self-monitoring were promoted in terms of forming a habit of thinking back to their purpose and goal, and the flow of the lesson. Basically, the autonomous activity of the trainees was, through utilization, the developmental focus of the whole process of planning - performing - evaluating - reflecting.

(5) Reflecting on own teaching practice

After the lesson, the trainee teacher described his/her reflection on three points in particular, being; 1) their evaluation of that day's lesson, 2) the lesson activities which had been planned but not done, 3) the class participants' attitude and performance.

(6) Mutual evaluation for monitoring

Those members who were not actually teaching the lesson attended the lesson as learners and at the same time, they acted as evaluators of the lesson progress and the teacher's performance. I also participated in the evaluation. After each lesson, the members evaluated and commented on the lesson by recording their thoughts on an evaluation sheet. All evaluation sheets were then given to the lesson organizer, and later on, the comments and evaluations were distributed back to everyone. Finally, I commented on the lesson and gave my feedback to the whole class.

(7) Wholistic evaluation feedback

The class members were given reflective opportunities to view each lesson from both the learners' perspective and the teacher's perspective. This evaluation work was usually given as homework. They were asked to consider the following three points: 1) which ideas they would like to take and use for their own teaching, 2) which aspects of the lesson they would like to do in a different way, and 3) the feeling which was present for learners during the lesson (the atmosphere in class). Each member's contribution was consolidated and distributed back to the class.

Classroom discussions:

(8) Classroom discussion after the teaching practice

Straight after each lesson, class members discussed the lesson according to the organizer's reflections. During this session, some ideas, opinions and new insights were aired and vigorously discussed, with this phase incorporating monitoring and deep reflection.

What effects have I had as a teacher-educator and a Japanese language teacher?

It might well have been very much to my advantage that I did not try to impart unilaterally instructive, knowledge-laden lectures or insist on my sole authority to evaluate in regards to the trainee teachers.

The following have been the effects on me of my own methods (Figure 2):

[Figure 2: Teacher's learning]

Teacher (teacher-educator) 's learning through learner development

Acquiring knowing:
(1) the learners' (trainee teachers') past experience
(2) their beliefs on classroom learning and the roles of a teacher/learner

Reflecting on:
(1) one's own teaching
(2) one's own methods and materials
(3) oneself as a teacher

Realizing:
(1) learners' views and feelings through experiencing as a learner
(2) one's own views and beliefs in teaching

Considering about:
(1) teachers' learning needs
(2) self-directed awareness and collaborative awareness

Acquiring knowledge about the learners:

(1) Promoting metacognitive awareness as a teacher-educator

I had a chance to promote my metacognitive knowledge about the learners. Through discussions and opinion exchanges, I had the chance to discover insights as to their past experiences and their thinking.

Reflecting on myself:

(2) Reflecting on my own Japanese language classes at university

To focus on learning, I became one of the learning participants in the lessons. This made me more aware of my own teaching practice in my Japanese language classes at university. Also, I have been able to boost my metacongitive awareness of both teacher and learner roles and perspectives. In fact, I have received many hints to ponder on concerning my class teaching from the trainee teachers.

(3) Being Aware of self as a teacher

The trainee teachers' enthusiasm stimulated me to reflect on my own teaching, as throughout the course they pushed themselves to the limit when producing their teaching plans, preparing creative materials, and co-operating with other members.

Realizing learners'/teachers' viewpoint

(4) Experiencing as a learner

In each lesson performed by the trainee teachers, I participated in the lesson as a learner and an evaluator. This role heightened my awareness of learners' perspectives, particularly in

discerning what sort of lessons are enjoyable and effective for learners. Also, I was able to empathise with learners' sense of anxiety in lessons arranged to impart a basic body of knowledge. Like many learners before me, I felt fear when I did not have any idea how to answer the teacher's questions. Occasionally I had the feeling that we could all learn together if we interacted with the other people in the class.

(5) Realizing my perspective as a teacher

I was aware that I had a different viewpoint from the learners even if we watched the same video and teaching materials. Since most of them had no experience of teaching at all, this lack of experience was reflected in the way that they saw everything from a learner's point of view. In contrast, I tended to see everything from the teacher's perspective even if I believed that I was really stressing learner-centred classroom learning. On various occasions, I even noticed that I unconsciously positioned and accepted myself as a teacher.

Considering the question of theory-to-practice and practice-to-theory

(6) Recognizing the relationship between self-direction and collaboration

When a strong teacher authority is promoted and accepted in a class, it is hard for the students to express their opinions actively and freely. This teaching practice resulted in them being given freedom to express their own ideas, while at the same time imposing on them a duty to take responsibility for their performance. Through this process, my own metacognitive awareness has been enhanced, and I have been obliged to reconsider learner autonomy and teacher autonomy theory. I have realized that metacognitive awareness of the learning process - what one seeks, what purpose one intends to put the new knowledge to, and which strategies are effective - is important in the development of self-directive awareness of one's own responsibility. On top of this, the self-direction obtained might lead to greater collaborative awareness.

I became aware that my attitude in this class depended not so much on my view of learner training itself, but rather that it was based on the trust and expectation brought to the class by the class members. Throughout the classes, I was continuously encouraging and encouraged by them.

What has happened?

In 1999, the idea of establishing a volunteer Japanese language class occurred to the class members at that time. Because they were not satisfied with merely absorbing class work, they wished to have a means of practicing their learned theory in an actual situation. They began by organizing questionnaires and posters to get some students and at present they are continuing to arrange their classroom facilities, developing teaching materials and advertising the course. Certainly, in this case the class members autonomously started moving on this project by themselves and it provides ample evidence that they are willing to take up the challenge for self-growth by putting themselves in actual situations which will utilize acquired learning.

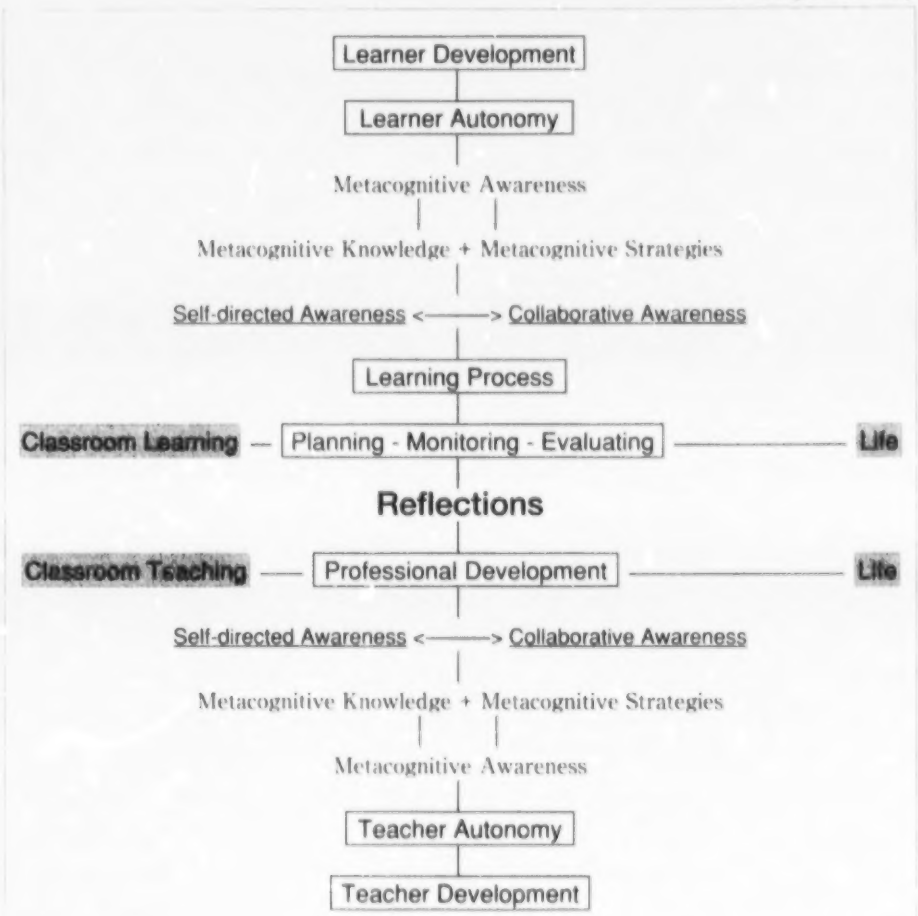
As the teacher-training course is of one year's duration the class therefore changes in terms of personnel, from one year to the next. In 2000, another idea was thought up by the new group of trainee teachers to recruit foreign students for their teaching practice opportunities. In the first instance, they wished to use this teaching practice as their prime opportunity to learn how to teach. Although initially it seemed very difficult to find any foreign students to participate, they finally got many more people than they had expected. At each session, it happened that the trainee teachers instinctively tried to cooperate with each other to improve their own and their colleagues' performance, and indeed it appeared to become a kind of community for all participants in the class. After the teaching practice, I asked their opinions about their experience. I felt sure that the practice was putting a lot of pressure on them because they had to prepare their lessons in their very limited spare time outside their jobs and the night classes. Surprisingly, however, all class members agreed that they needed more such opportunities, not fewer and that above all they needed as many chances as possible to try and learn from actual teaching practice.

Discussions: from learner development towards teacher metacognitive awareness

Collaborative awareness might not necessarily occur as a result of setting particular learning activities such as the one outlined above, but it might instead occur through strengthened awareness of self-responsibility and self-direction. In particular, the learner's perception of the teachers' trust, support, expectation, and recognition could be hugely influential. In addition, when class members have a relationship of mutual reliance and as a community are directing themselves towards a common goal, their motivation and stimulation as learners are positively affected. There may be a reciprocal relationship at work here, as it seems that promoting learner autonomy leads to collaborative awareness, while such collaboration might in turn lead to stronger learner autonomy. In this adult class, each member's self-directed awareness and responsibility were crucial building-blocks for collaborative awareness and establishing a sense of community in the class. Moreover, such learner development affected my metacogntive awareness and autonomy as a teacher-educator as well as a Japanese language teacher.

It occurs to me also that there are various manners and degrees of learner autonomy which are expressed, or not expressed as actual observable classroom behaviours, and which exist according to the situation. Further, learner autonomy should not be considered only within the classroom learning context but it should be extended to include time spent outside the classroom as well. The matter at issue is the means by which classroom learning can be made most effective for the learners' self-development, and in any given instance this will be related to the nature and extent of the teacher's professional development. Therefore, I think awareness is connected to both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy (Figure 3). Depending on the context, the real issue for teachers is to ask themselves in what ways they can make learning effective for their students, and in so doing, put the focus on learning rather than teaching.

[Figure 3: Learner Development <==>Teacher Development Model]



Further implications

Discussions on the meaning of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy have been exciting in recent years. Making clear definitions of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy will lead us toward deeper consideration and maybe greater understanding of our classroom learning and our role as teachers. In my view, a true test of teacher autonomy is the ability of teachers to be aware of their students' needs, and the means by which teachers are able to support learner autonomy within the learners' minds. As teachers we should always reflect on and be aware of the content and the presentation of our teaching from the learners' viewpoint. Probably, such self-directed awareness will confirm our belief in the need for collaboration and through the access to the ideas of others afforded by collaboration, our reflective awareness will be enhanced. Teachers and students are both learning together but they have different views of the learning process, and

this connection between teachers and students extends also to their respective self-growth. So, for this reason, learner autonomy and teacher autonomy should be considered as mutually interdependent.

In this paper, from my practice of Japanese language teacher education, I discussed the manner in which metacognitive awareness was raised, and what resultant effects occurred for both the learners and myself. I feel that this kind of interaction between theory and practice will be needed more and more in future to improve the quality of both. Actual classroom research by teachers themselves will become increasingly important in order to better understand learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

Notes

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